



## Public Health Update

### Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

June 25, 2010

The state of California is currently experiencing an outbreak of pertussis within the state. The California Department of Public Health has announced that as of mid-June, 916 confirmed cases have been reported, compared to 219 cases for the same period last year. In addition, more than 600 possible cases have been reported. Five infants, all under three months of age, have died from the disease in 2010.

Two cases of pertussis have recently been reported in Southern Nevada, although widespread transmission of disease has not yet been identified. The health district has not identified any direct links between these cases and California cases. The Southern Nevada Health District is issuing a community-wide notification to parents, health care providers, and travelers regarding this outbreak.

Outbreaks in neighboring communities increase the risk of transmission, and as the summer vacation season approaches, the health district is reminding travelers to check the immunization status for themselves and their children. Southern Nevada's lowest immunization rates occur in children under 36 months of age, the group most vulnerable to serious illness and complications.

The Southern Nevada Health District is advising parents and caregivers who bring their children to the health district to update their pertussis vaccinations, including adults who care for or live with infants. In addition, it has provided information to physicians and health care providers to consider pertussis and test for it when patients appear symptomatic.

Pertussis is a very contagious, bacterial respiratory disease. Although it might be a mild disease in older children and adults, in younger children it can result in hospitalization due to complications including severe respiratory distress and inflammation of the brain. In very rare cases, pertussis can cause death, especially in children less than one year of age.

Children and adults who are partially protected by the vaccine can have a milder illness than infants and very young children, however, they can still transmit the disease to others, including infants too young to be immunized. Infants younger than six months might have a cough that does not include the "whooping" sound. Prompt use of antibiotics in a household is helpful in limiting other cases.

The disease can occur at any age, but it is most commonly reported in children during the first year of life. Infants and young children usually get the disease from an older sibling or from an adult who has a mild case of the illness. The bacteria are spread in the air by droplets produced during coughing or sneezing. Once a person is exposed, it takes seven to 10 days before the first symptoms appear.

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## Public Health Update: Pertussis – add one

Symptoms of pertussis usually occur in stages, with the initial stage appearing like a cold with a runny nose, sneezing, low-grade fever and a cough, which lasts one to two weeks before it worsens. The second stage of the disease includes uncontrolled coughing spells followed by the “whooping” sound a person makes when he breathes in. During these severe coughing spells, vomiting may occur, or the person’s lips or face might look blue due to a lack of oxygen. The second stage can last four to six weeks.

Pertussis can be prevented through vaccination. Children attending school in Clark County must be immunized against pertussis before they can attend kindergarten and prior to entering the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. Older children and adults up to age 64 should receive Tdap vaccine instead of their next tetanus shot. It is especially important for children older than age 11 and adults who live with or care for infants to be vaccinated. The Tdap vaccine prevents the illness in 70 percent to 90 percent of those who receive it. Because immunity begins to wane approximately five years after the last dose of vaccine, adolescents and adults are left with little or no protection against the disease.